

Week Ending Friday, January 10, 1997

The President's Radio Address

January 4, 1997

Good morning, and Happy New Year. I look forward to 1997 with great optimism. As we enter this new year, I'm preparing to enter my second term as your President, committed to continuing our mission of preparing our people for the 21st century, meeting our new challenges, and strengthening our oldest values. We will work to give our people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives, to build strong families and strong communities. And as we work to expand opportunity, we will also seek responsibility from every American.

This approach is working. In just 4 years we have replaced trickle-down economics with invest-and-grow economics, responsibility, and opportunity. We've cut the deficit by 60 percent, increased our trade to record levels. We have over 11 million new jobs.

In just 4 years, working with citizens and communities all over America to solve our social problems, we have replaced political rhetoric with a strategy of giving people the tools to solve their problems and demanding responsibility from all of our citizens. It's working, too. Crime has dropped for the last 4 years as we work to put 100,000 police on our streets and take gangs and guns away from our children. The welfare rolls have dropped by 2.1 million—that's a record reduction—as we work to help people find work but to require them to pursue work and education and to be responsible parents.

But there's still a lot more to do if we're going to make sure the American dream is a reality for all of our citizens in the 21st century. And we still have some pretty big problems in our society. None stands in our way of achieving our goals for America more than the epidemic of teen pregnancy. Today I want to talk to you about the progress we've made in preventing it and to tell you about the new steps we're taking to see to it that

our progress carries into the new year and beyond.

We know many of our social problems have their roots in the breakdown of our families. We know children who are born to teen parents are more likely to drop out of school, get involved in crime and drugs, and end up in poverty; more likely to suffer ill health, even to die as infants. And teen parents often find their own lives are changed forever. Too many don't finish school, not ever, and therefore, they never learn the skills they need to succeed as workers and parents in our new economy.

That's why our administration has worked so hard to reduce teen pregnancies, to increase responsibility among teen parents, and to prepare young people to be good parents at the right time. Last year I took executive action to require young mothers to stay in school or lose their welfare payments. We challenged members of the private sector to take action, and they did, with a national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy and community initiatives all over our Nation.

We're mounting an unprecedented crack-down on child support enforcement. Now child support collections are up over 50 percent, compared to 4 years ago. And we've worked with community-based groups in the character education movement in our schools to help parents teach young people right from wrong. Today we have new evidence that this approach is starting to work.

Last year we learned that the teen birth rate has dropped for the 4th year in a row, and that out-of-wedlock birth rates dropped for the first time in 19 years. According to a new report by the Department of Health and Human Services, the teen birth rates dropped more than 10 percent over 3 years in Wisconsin, Washington, and 8 other States. And altogether, from 1991 to 1995, the teen birth rate in America has dropped by 8 percent.

The progress we're making on teen pregnancy shows that we can overcome even our most stubborn and serious problems. Because of the energy and the effort of the American people, as I said, the crime rate is dropping, the welfare rolls have dropped dramatically, and poverty is down. We can meet our challenges if we'll meet them together, in our homes, our communities, and as a nation. But let me be clear: The teen pregnancy rate is still intolerably high in America. Too many children are still having children. So we must do more.

As I enter my second term, I want to tell you the new and comprehensive steps my administration will take to further reduce the number of out-of-wedlock births:

First, we'll step up support for programs at the local level at work, providing \$7½ million for pioneering programs like the one at Emory University in Atlanta, where young people teach their peers about abstinence and responsibility.

Second, we'll spread the word about these programs so that what works in one community can be tried quickly in more communities.

Third, we'll forge even stronger partnerships with businesses, clergy, and community groups who are committed to dealing with this issue.

And fourth, we'll see to it that we use the most up-to-date research methods to track teen pregnancy trends. We have to make sure our efforts are actually paying off.

Finally, we'll carry out the strong provisions of the welfare reform law I signed last year, which requires teen mothers who receive welfare not only to stay in school but to live at home or in an adult-supervised setting. It sets up second-chance homes where young mothers who can't go home still have a safe place to raise a child and turn their lives around. And it institutes the toughest ever child support measures.

We've made some significant progress in the effort against teen pregnancy in the last few years. With the new steps I'm announcing today, we'll continue our fight against children having children. All of you need to help us send the strongest possible message: It's wrong to be pregnant or father a child

unless you are married and ready to take on the responsibilities of parenthood.

What we're doing to prevent teen pregnancy as a nation is an example of how we can master many of the challenges of our time. The National Government cannot solve all our problems, but it can help by giving individuals, families, and communities the tools they need to take responsibility and solve those problems for themselves.

As President, I'm committed to marshaling all the forces in our society to mobilizing our citizens, our communities, our businesses, our schools to meet our challenges. That is the way we will keep the promise of America alive for all our citizens as we move into the 21st century.

Thanks for listening, and Happy New Year.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Mahogany Run Golf Course in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Statement on the Decline in Serious Crime

January 5, 1997

These new FBI statistics show that for the fifth year in a row, serious crime in this country has declined. This is the longest period of decline in over 25 years.

At the beginning of my administration, we set out to change this country's approach to crime by putting more officers on our streets through community policing and taking guns out of the hands of criminals. We are making a difference. Today, our neighborhoods are safer, and we are restoring the American people's confidence that crime can be reduced.

But our work is not done. We must continue to move in the right direction by adding more police officers, cracking down on gangs, and reducing gun and drug violence. That is why I have placed curbing juvenile violence at the top of my anticrime agenda for the new year.

NOTE: This statement was embargoed for release until 5 p.m.